



IN BED WITH KEROUAC

BRENDAN SLATER

Introduction by Michael McClintock

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In Bed With Kerouac — Brendan Slater

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Foreword By Michael McClintock

President, Tanka Society of America (2004-2010)
Tanka Editor, Notes from the Gean

This is Brendan Slater's first collection of contemporary English language tanka, haiku, and haibun (prose and haiku). The poems are set in a world remote from the early and Heian-era poetry (waka) of a thousand years ago out of which tanka emerged, remote also from the haiku and haibun of the famed Basho of 17th century Japan.

Remote, but not unrelated: These poems have long roots, subterranean connections, drawing from ancient sources. In that, they are like the dandelion, a weed, and their "flower" fragile and humble, also like the dandelion, with its hair-like parachute balls and wind-aided dispersal. In effect, this book is Slater's "Dandelion Sutra" --- this is not the title but my impression of the work as a whole.

In *Bed with Kerouac* is dedicated to the American writer Jack Kerouac (1922-1969), who struggled with the same demons, addictions, failings, and interminable battles with self, impulse, and compulsion, as Slater describes for us here.

This would be a book of despair, were it not for the healing and rebuilding hidden like seed in its rhythms, images, and compact language.

How fortunate all of us would be, to have the same courage, to make songs and insist that songs prevail.

California, August 2012

blinded
by a glint of sunlight
from my jimmy—
the cash box opens
another day of IOUs

squashed tomatoes
and stew
a noose
around your neck
I kick away the chair

she hates it
how I cannot control
my compulsions
a perfectly straight line
of empty pill bottles

after a day
sliding from bar to bar
with my new friend
he pulls from his rucksack
six inches of cold steel

I'm uneasy
on the bus ride
to the clinic—
in the rush hour crowd
just a hint of myself

in the waiting room
I translate the sign
Addiction Care—
suddenly aware of the habit
of laughing at my own jokes

at a dark table
in a dirty tin ashtray
an unsmoked cigarette—
I close my eyes and become
someone else, somewhere else

forming
atom by atom
deep in my gut
a blood diamond
for my funeral

a mattress
on a concrete floor
since I sold my bed
no-one comes to visit me
not even in my dreams

Her

It's a simple recipe if you have enough flair to overuse the cumin, underuse the lemon juice and add just the right amount of her essence caught on a warm summer-night breeze. Stir until morning.

finished
the washing up
I look for you
in the dark places
of your absence

Something in her eyes called Nothing

I grab my coat, take her by the arm and lead her to
a metal staircase tucked around a corner in the
backs. We wait in the dark.

face of an angel
under my dealer's hoody—
stars are made from rock

city night
the gangster
tightens his hood

no moon
i explore
my inner space

spring round the corner
even the ice
is black

no-morning
the cold
blue

first light
my last Rizla
taken by the breeze

dawn breaks
between her excuses
ash in my coffee

ploughed earth
the devil's horns
in a cloud

the stubborn bitch curls in her hair Siberian wind

Dry

TV's not up to much—I google Peter Sutcliffe for a half hour or so. The second-hand two-cup peculator gurgles from the kitchen. My cats sleep through it like they do most days. I chew my pills, wash them down with a gulp of coffee, lie back and wait for it to pass.

this thirst
that came with the rain
lingers long
after the wind blows
the pavement dry

Someone

Take me out and shoot me in the back of the head.
The council will clean up the blood.

light
at 5am
the bin wagon

Toilet roll and lager

The shop opens at 8am. I'm the first at the till with a packet of toilet rolls and my can of lager—neither embarrasses me.

she tells my age
by the rings round my eyes
first spring day

&&

I work the night with my hands over the cliff's
edge-a-ram bleats about rising^sea levels out
a.cross in green*neon lightens the load of my
guilt=demands through the letter box me into a
corner shop selling up the River Trent™

my cigarette {
 half full {
 my glass {}
 } of wine }
half smoked

My

wrath and spittle

a seed

lost to the night

On the back seat creeping forward.

When

It's when the bus rounds this bend on
Coevordenweg my heart sinks as I think of the
grotty little flat we shared when you were still my
wife and we were unhappy together rather than
apart.

T-shirt
and cut-off jeans
summer rain

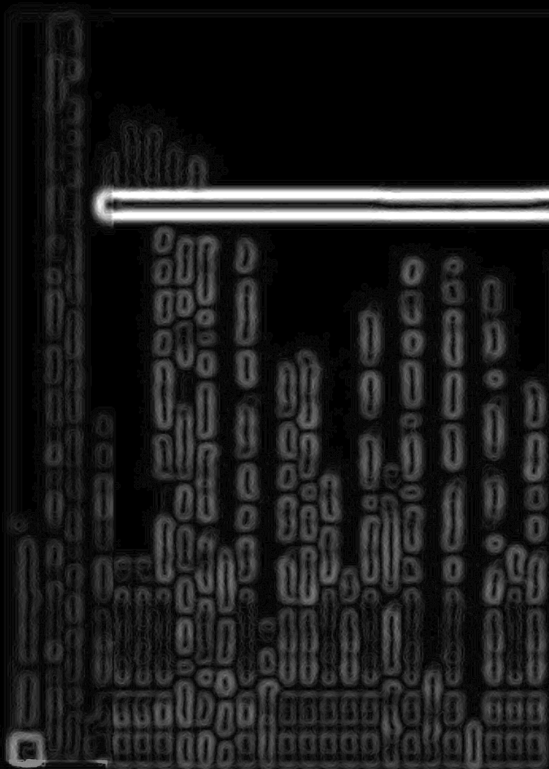
every woman
I see these days
is an urban fox
dodging traffic to feed
on the scraps of my heart

nothing to do
but lie on my back
in this single bed
there's no empty space to fill
just the coldness of the wall

in time
the cold sun
will warm . . .
until then I'll make do
with the fire in your eyes

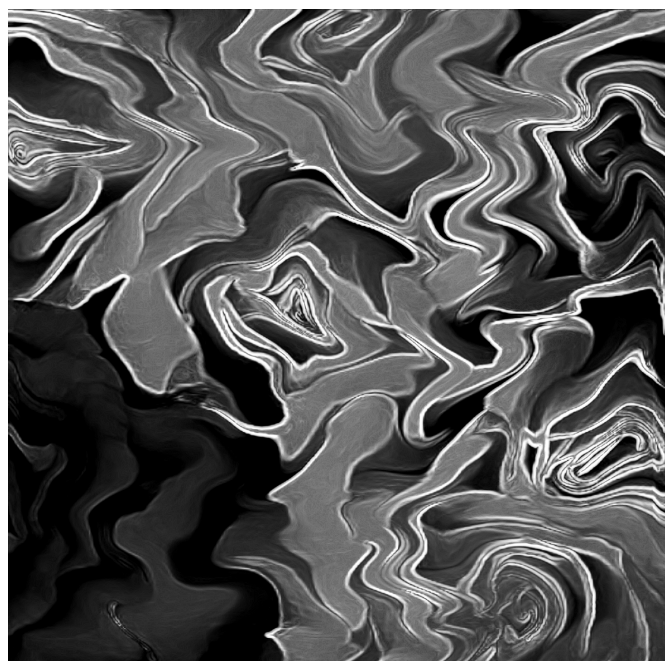
roaming
the shallow wood
we used to sleep in
I want to burn
the whole thing down

Live Chat

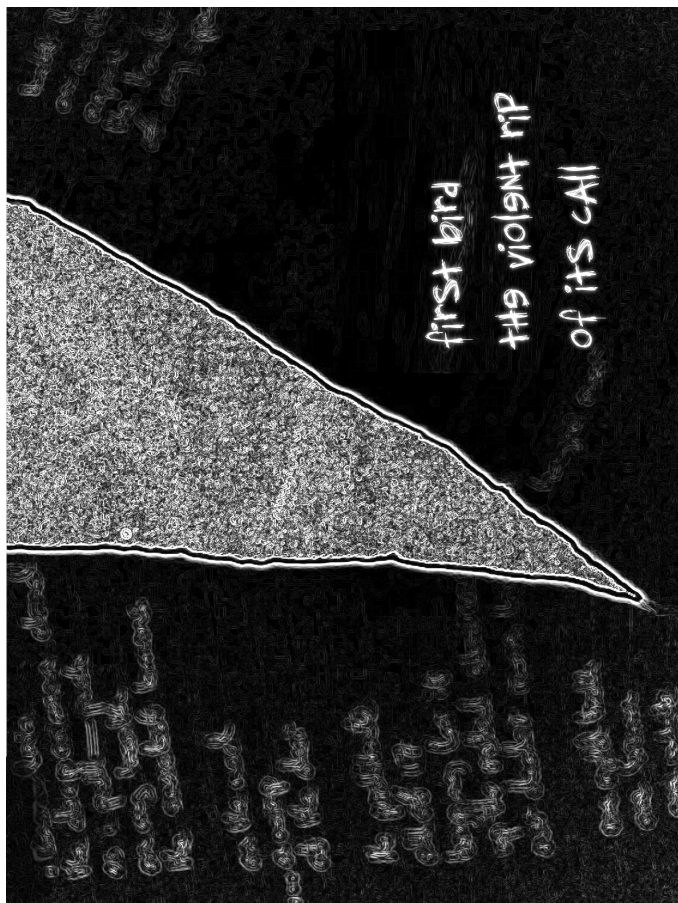


13 beers and a keg of regret

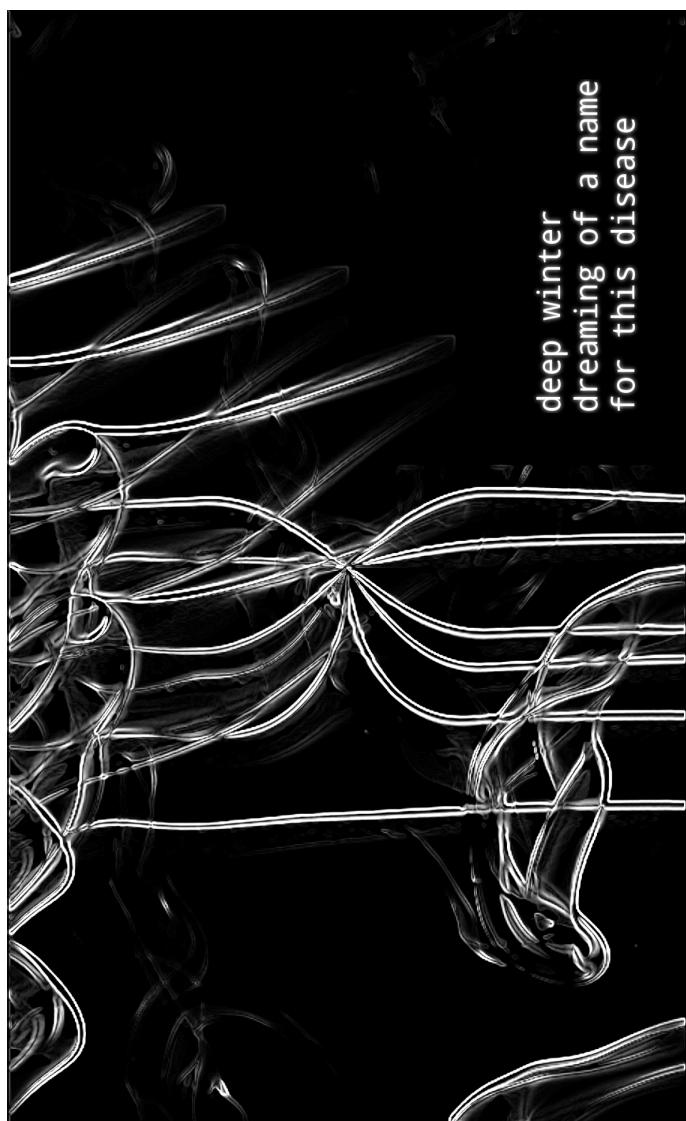
In Bed With Kerouac



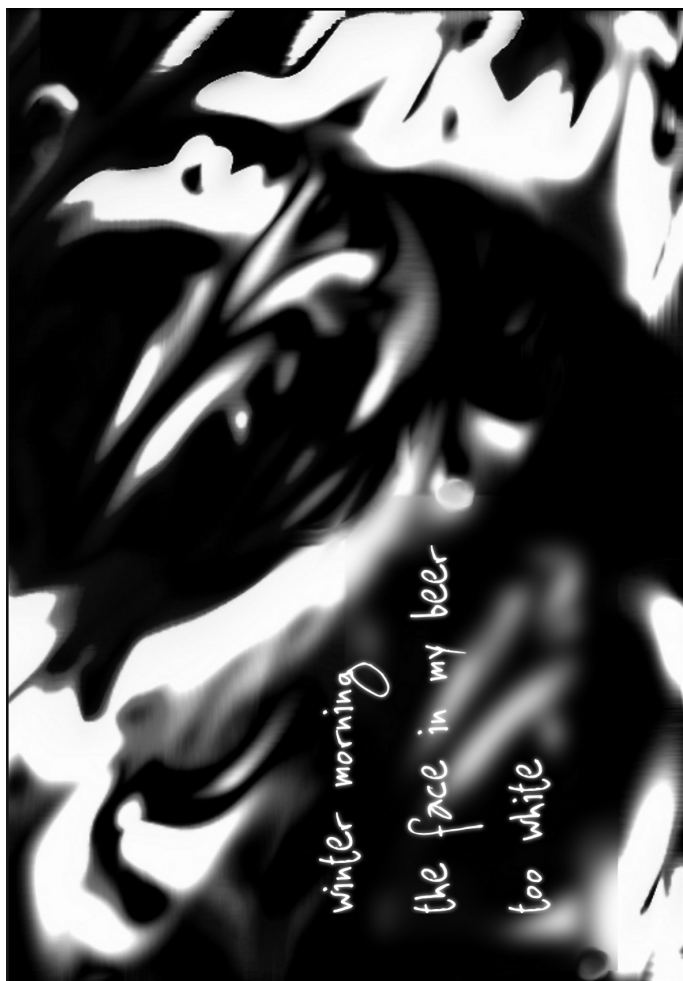
invisible presence u may disturb her



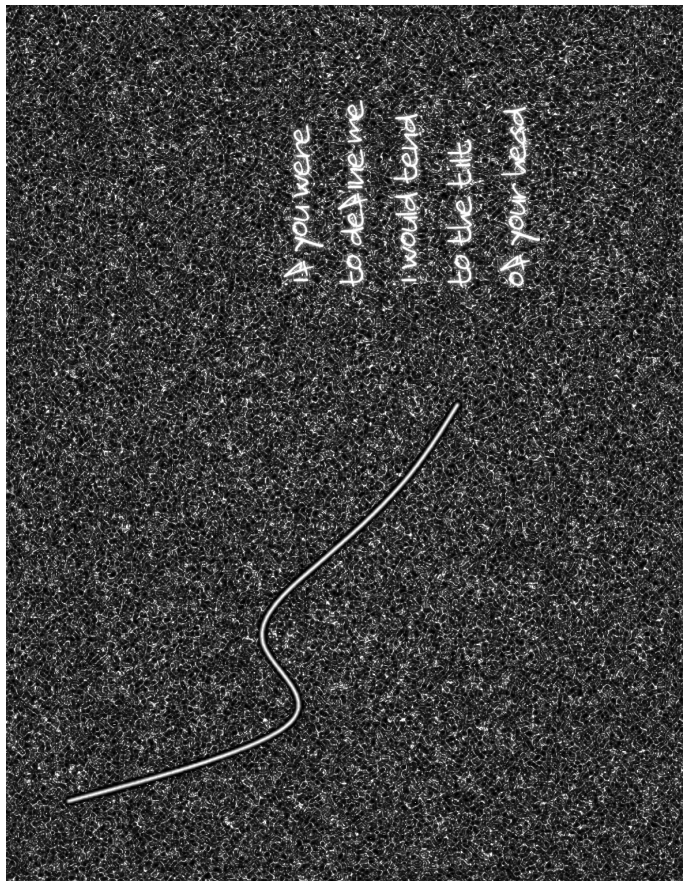
In Bed With Kerouac



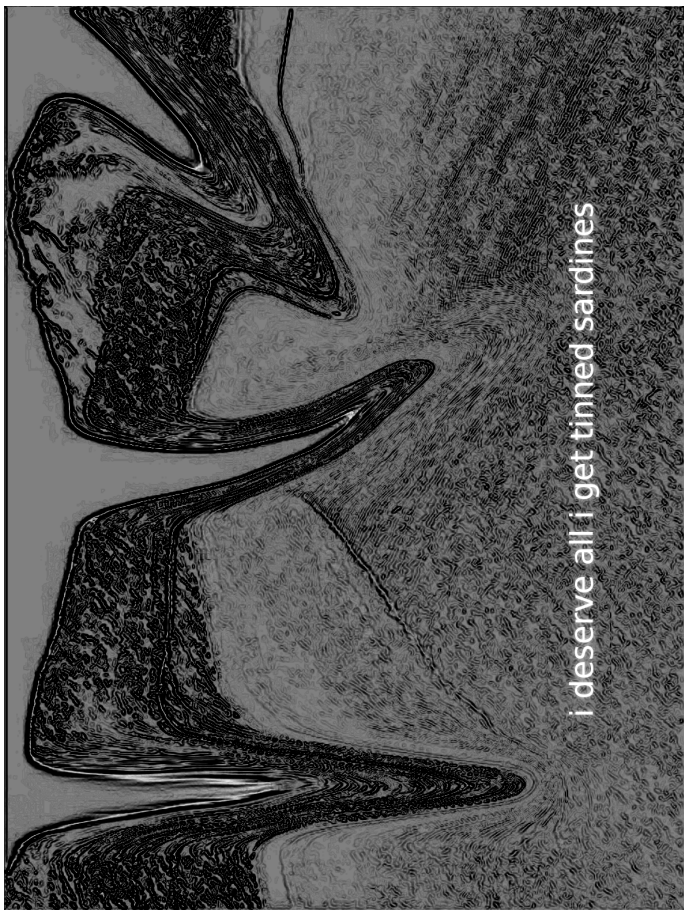
deep winter
dreaming of a name
for this disease

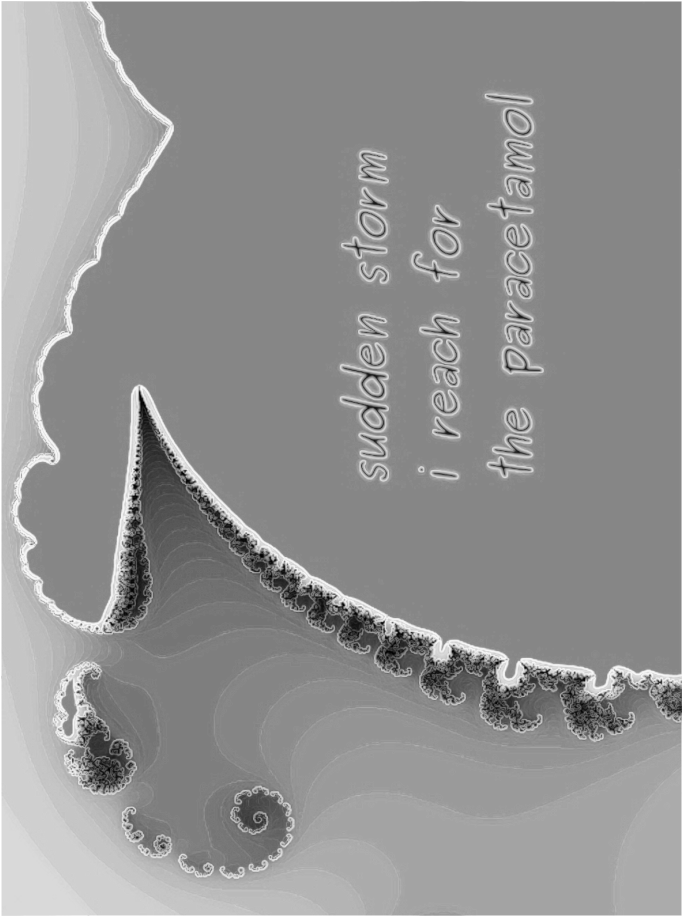






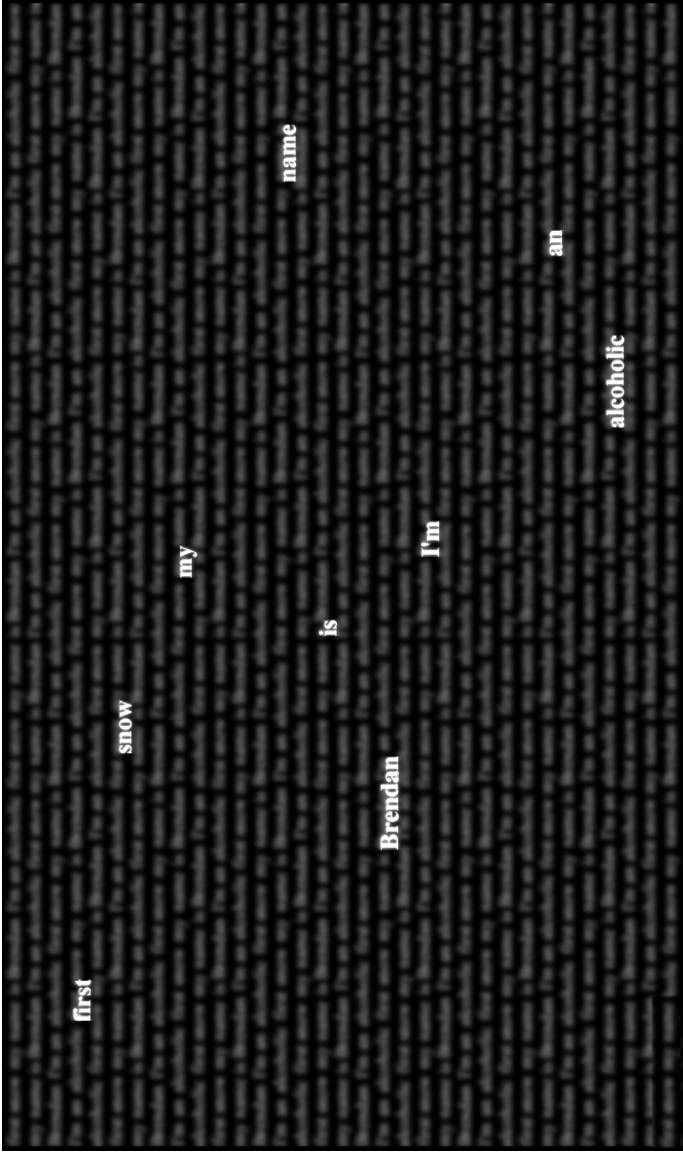
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rush
the lights
go out

summer solstice
i touch it
four times

days, weeks, months
her dressing gown still hanging
on our bedroom door

in and out
of sleep
her fingers
turning pages

lost her to another nightmare

night train to Amsterdam
our Dutch keeps running
into English

three stops off—
i close my eyes,
soften the noise

before dawn
the ancient language
of a cat's tail

the lie
i almost tell
bruised ginger

winter morning
deeper than usual
into the city

snowfall
filling in
a tree

the ruins
of the lockkeeper's house
first few spots of rain

a spatter
of raindrops on the window
abnormal cells

a tanka
in my pocket . . .
starlight

pewter sky
the litany
of the ocean

Setting

I've an hour's walk everyday in my plan made up by the detox staff. I'm following it pretty well, cooking, cleaning, showering, washing, household chores are all done. Fresh air heightens my senses, brightens colours of '60s shop signs running down the high street. At its end there's a cycle path leading up to the flatland—I turn a corner.

the hawk hovers—
a patchwork of lilies
in the drainage ditch

Visiting time

In my room lying on the bed listening to voices
from the corridor growing in volume and intensity—
none of them I recognize. I long for one last shot in
the arm.

my eyes open—
the door frame
a pale grey

tonight
the tender moon
is waning
I mould myself around you
breathe when you breathe

face to face
in a world of sound bites
I listen
to what you read
between my lines

you leave
on the first train . . .
I lie awake
to stretch the night
that little bit longer

nothing
between us
on the train journey home
hiding your eyes
with a cheap pair of shades

writing poetry
on a mobile phone
outside a snack bar
the same chill wind
that stirred our ancestors

sinking into
the rhythm of the bus
at dusk
the deep blue sky
I built as a child

shoveling
sawdust into a barrow
and then
the cold rain
of everything

crows in the road
squabbling over
something
I try not to look at
a young man's limp

at first light
he leaves for the boat
without me—
I was never sure
of my father's smile

sudden rain—
I take his hand
whisk him to shelter
under the cedar tree
my little boy and me

afraid to be
alone with her
alone with myself
on a red leather sofa
at a bar in Chinatown

i think
we argue
just to make up . . .
contrails cross
in the blue dawning sky

shifting
in and out
of the city
my hunger mirrored
in the eyes of the crowd

ur txts
kilobytes
of empty words
I tap 2 samaritans
4 3 quid an'a pouch o'burn

on Sundays
I phone my only son
just so he's sure
I'm still the father
I never was

your number
written on my palm
in blue—
tonight with each cigarette
the moon wanes a little more

4am

4am
her red eyes sparkle
I pluck
from my thigh
the hair of a cat

I take a sip
of bitter coffee
she remembers
how it used to be
before computers

and rolls
a dusty cigarette
I cover up
the crescent moon
with the clouds

and then . . .
the cat's soft purr
the wind
at the window

WHAT HEAVEN 17 SAID (Finally in Sepia)

I'm good for nothing, worse at much more. I'm a stalking cat slipping into your shadow. I can't see Shhh, don't look or speak, just listen. you. When I left I ripped your flesh deep cuts that exposed your worth, Let your core that had been hidden for the length of each cut. I finally saw you me whole as you never intended me to, expected me to. The life of every earthly creature is finite but once lost survives in the clatter of raindrops go

my blood on the rocks—
fast as it the wash rises
into the pool

Credits

Many of the poems in this book were previously published in: *Notes from the Gean*, *Ribbons*, *Atlas Poetica*, *LYNX*, *Presence*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Daily Haiga*, *Acorn*, *A Hundred Gourds*, *The Heron's Nest*, *Contemporary Haibun Online*, *Contemporary Haibun*, *Take Five*, *Electronic Poetry Network* and *Tinywords*.

IN BED WITH KEROUAC

From the most romantic of poems to tanka where you need a sharps box; to haiku that touch you deeply in the most intimate moments of immediacy. In Bed With Kerouac is modern haiku, tanka, haibun and tanka prose, and other verse for the realities and edgy romances of this fledgling don't know where to go yet 21st Century.

—Alan Summers, *With Words*



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short verse**